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Special to The New York Times

2 Held in Costa Rica Tell of Trip From U.S. to Join 'Contras'

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica, July 7—Two foreigners being held here on weapons charges have given detailed accounts of how, they say, they volunteered to join anti-Sandinista forces, traveled to Central America from Florida aboard a plane loaded with weapons and took part in raids in Nicaragua.

Their accounts, given last week, suggested that members of the Costa Rican Civil and Rural Guard have provided intelligence and other help to anti-Sandinista groups operating along the Nicaraguan border.

The two men, Steven Carr, 28 years old, originally of Kingston, N. Y., and Peter Frederick Gilberry, 24, a Briton, were among five foreigners captured by the Rural Guard on April 25. The three others, an American, another Briton and a Frenchman, declined to be interviewed.

Costa Rican officials took strong exception to the men's assertion that Costa Rican guardsmen were collaborating with anti-Sandinista fighters, who are known as contras.

"What the prisoners say is false," said the presidential spokesman, Armando Vargas. "We do not permit

mercenaries to come to Costa Rica to fight against Nicaragua. If we were cooperating with the contras, these mercenaries would be free, but in fact they are in jail."

'Legitimate People'

Mr. Carr and Mr. Gilberry said they had volunteered to fight alongside the largest rebel army, the Nicaraguan Democratic Force. In a telephone interview from Miami, the leader of the Democratic Force, Adolfo Calero Portocarrero, said the men "are legitimate people, volunteers who found their way to Central America in order to cooperate with the struggle against Communism." But he said he had no detailed knowledge of their activities and therefore could not comment on their stories.

Mr. Calero said the Democratic Force, which until now has operated almost exclusively from northern Nicaragua, had begun collaborating with other rebel groups along the Costa Rican border.

Mr. Carr said he came to Costa Rica this year with the help of Bruce Jones, an American citrus farmer who was later expelled from Costa Rica after an account describing his connections to the rebels. He said Mr. Jones introduced him to members of Brigade 2508, an anti-Communist group of Cuban exiles founded by participants in the abortive 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion.

A member of Brigade 2508, Raul Masvidal, said in a telephone interview that his organization "has participated in efforts to raise money for the contras." But he said the brigade did not supply arms.

Mr. Gilberry said he had come to Central America with the help of an Alabama-based group, Civilian Military Assistance, which has helped other Americans seeking to fight the Sandinistas. He said he and a comrade, John Davies, a former British Army officer he had met in South Africa,

fight in Central America. Both then traveled by bus to Miami, where they checked into the Howard Johnson Airport Hotel.

Cargo Items Named

Mr. Carr said he volunteered to drive a truck to various depots around Miami to pick up arms and ammunition that Brigade 2508 had acquired and was donating to the anti-Sandinista cause. He and Mr. Gilberry said the cargo included M-16 automatic rifles, 20-millimeter cannons, 50-caliber machine guns and 60-millimeter mortars.

Tom Posey, who heads Civil Military Assistance, confirmed that he had helped Mr. Gilberry and Mr. Davies travel to Central America. "Their credentials looked good, so we sent them on down," he said by telephone from Alabama. He denied having provided them with weapons.

Mr. Carr and Mr. Gilberry said that early on March 6 they and their three comrades took off from the airport in Fort Lauderdale aboard a chartered cargo plane laden with six tons of military supplies. "There were no customs checks, and nobody asked any questions," Mr. Carr said.

A spokesman for the Customs Service in Miami, Cliff Stelling, said that American law subjects all cargo flights leaving the United States to inspection. "Occasionally people circumvent the Customs law," he said. "It does happen."

A Walk Across the Border

The plane landed at the Hlopaugu military airfield in San Salvador, according to the men's account. From San Salvador, they said, the five flew to San Jose on a commercial flight.

The men said that on March 25 they walked across the border to a guerrilla camp about 500 yards inside Nicaragua. They said that there were 40 or 50 men at the camp and that they were being supplied by small planes flown from El Salvador by Salvadoran Air Force pilots.

The men said they were regularly visited at their camp inside Nicaragua by uniformed members of the Costa Rican Rural and Civil Guard. "They were telling us which bases to attack and where everything was," Mr. Gilberry said of the Costa Rican guardsmen. "They gave us all our information."

"The Civil Guard is up to their necks in this," Mr. Carr said. "They were helping us all along."

Attack on Base Recounted

Both men said they had taken part in raids inside Nicaragua. Mr. Carr said he was part of a group that attacked a Sandinista base known as La Esperanza on April 11, and Mr. Gilberry said men on missions he described as "wandering around inside Nicaragua doing battle and pieces." He would not elaborate.

On April 24, while the five soldiers of fortune were on Costa Rican soil, a patrol of Rural Guardsmen visited them. The two men said they recognized some of the soldiers as frequent visitors and were not alarmed at first. But to their surprise, they said, the patrol arrested all five of them, along with nine Nicaraguans.

There are believed to be divisions within the Costa Rican Government over how harshly to crack down on the rebels. In an interview, Minister of Public Security Benjamin Piza said he believed the five foreigners should be freed and deported because they were charged with "minor crimes." But after consulting with other officials, he reported that the case was in the hands of the judiciary and that he could do nothing because Costa Rica was a "terribly legalistic" country.

"I cannot guarantee that a couple of our men might not have been involved with the contras without the knowledge of the ministry," Mr. Piza said. "If we find out who they are, they will be removed from the country."

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